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C O N F I D E N T I A L   BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 000597

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SUBJECT: SINGAPOREAN VIEW OF BRUNEIAN ADHERENCE TO PSI,  
BRUNEI'S FUTURE LEADERSHIP

Classified By: Ambassador Emil Skodon for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Singaporean High Commissioner believes Malaysia's coolness toward the Proliferation Security Initiative may be causing Brunei to delay a decision on adherence to PSI principles, in accordance with Brunei's desire to avoid taking a stand on any issue on which its two closest ASEAN partners (Singapore and Malaysia) do not agree.

He said that Crown Prince Billah acquitted himself well during meetings with Singaporean leaders earlier this year. The High Commissioner recommended a USG invitation to the Crown Prince and more U.S. military training at the Bruneian Jungle Warfare Center that is extensively used by Singapore's Armed Forces, implying that an active USG role in Brunei would be in Singapore's strategic interest. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador discussed Brunei-Singapore relations and other subjects with outgoing Singaporean High Commissioner Hirubalan, who is slated to depart Bandar Seri Begawan in December to take up his new post as Singapore's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. (Ambassador Skodon and High Commissioner Hirubalan had worked together previously when the Ambassador was posted to Singapore in the mid-90's.)

¶3. (C) Brunei-Singapore-Malaysia Relations and PSI: Hirubalan said that Brunei-Singapore relations were excellent and cooperation was good in a range of areas, although the Government of Brunei (GOB) was careful to maintain a balance between Singapore and Malaysia, the two ASEAN countries with whom it had the closest relationships. For example, Brunei was usually not shy about staking out its own positions on issues being discussed within ASEAN, with the exception of those on which Singapore and Malaysia differed. In such cases, the GOB would reserve judgment until Singapore and Kuala Lumpur had worked out a compromise, out of concern for offending one or the other by appearing to take sides. According to Hirubalan, this might explain why the GOB had not yet decided to endorse PSI principles. The Government of Singapore (GOS) had talked to the Bruneians about signing on to PSI and believed that they were now favorably inclined, but were holding back due to a desire not to be in conflict with Kuala Lumpur, which they perceived as cool to PSI.

¶4. (C) Future Leadership and the Crown Prince: Hirubalan said the GOS recognized the importance of personal relationships in its dealings with Brunei, and so had an active program to pair its rising government officials in two-way exchanges with what it described as &Third Generation& GOB leaders. In practice, this usually meant Singaporeans in their 30's were paired with Bruneians in their 40's. The High Commissioner disagreed with the common view that Crown Prince Billah was not now and might never be fully capable of taking over the throne from his father. He warned GOS ministers not to be condescending to the Crown Prince but to engage him in substantive discussions, and when that advice was followed Billah acquitted himself well. During the Crown Prince's visit to Singapore in March of this year at the invitation of Defense Minister Teo, for example, he held his own in private meetings with Minister Mentor Lee, Senior Minister Goh, and Prime Minister Lee. Hirubalan recommended that the USG look for an opportunity to issue an invitation for a visit by the Crown Prince, perhaps

from SecDef Rumsfeld. Even if the invitation was not accepted, both Billah and the Sultan would appreciate the gesture and so become more well-disposed toward the U.S.

¶15. (C) Security Relations: GOS Armed Forces sent about 6,000 troops a year through the GOB Jungle Warfare Center in the Temburong District, according to the High Commissioner. This was considered very high quality training, and within the ranks of Singapore's ground forces was seen as essential for career advancement. Hirubalan recommended that the U.S. military, possibly Special Forces Command, look to establish a regular training schedule at the Center as well. In addition to the worthwhile training that could be gained, such a move would send a valuable political signal about the level of U.S. involvement in the region. (Comment: Embassy's Singapore-based DATT has in fact requested visits to the Temburong site through his Singapore military contacts in the past, but has never received a direct response. End Comment.)

¶16. (C) Brunei's Long-Term Stability: The High Commissioner did not see any near-term threats to Bruneian stability, thanks to the GOB policy of maintaining what amounted to a welfare state, its good leadership, and effective internal controls such as the requirement that all Friday sermons in Brunei's mosques be pre-approved by the authorities. He wondered if that would remain true, however, if a natural disaster or terrorist attack were to shut off oil production for several months. Bruneians were accustomed to having their needs met by the GOB and gave it their loyalty in return, but if the GOB could no longer keep up its end of the bargain due to sudden disruption in oil and gas revenue, &there was no fallback.<sup>8</sup> Hirubalan thought that the answer to this potential dilemma was greater popular participation in government. That would help create more national solidarity among Bruneians than if they just continued as passive recipients of government largesse. He thought that recent moves to expand the importance of elections to village councils and the roles played by those elected officials could be a positive step in this direction, if the GOB followed through on its good intentions.

¶17. (C) Regional Organizations: Hirubalan was unsure where the East Asia Summit (EAS) might lead and confirmed that Beijing appeared to be becoming less enthused about the EAS as it realized that the inclusion of Australia and India would lessen its prospects for dictating the Summit agenda. The PRC could fall back to the ASEAN 3 and ARF as preferred regional forums, although it was not happy about the central role played by ASEAN in those gatherings. Hirubalan said it remained the firm Singaporean view that ASEAN had to remain as the primary organizer because it was the only participant that was not perceived as a threat by any of the others.

¶18. (C) Comment: High Commissioner Hirubalan's pointed questions during the conversation about USG goals and objectives in Brunei and his unsolicited recommendations about measures to improve U.S.-Brunei relations implied that the GOS believes a stronger U.S. role in Brunei to be in Singapore's strategic regional interests. End Comment.

SKODON